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The Concise Critter User Guide

A guide to a theriotype that will just "not f*****g well fuse or integrate with the rest"

A little howl into the void
by Shimi & Critter

Intoduction: The Critter User Guide

Therianthropy is often presented as a smooth integration of human and animal selves. This model suggests that once we embrace our animal nature, we become whole, merging two halves into a cohesive being. But what happens when the creature refuses to integrate? What about when the critter within is its own being, with its wants, needs, and desires, separate from a human self?

This zine is the beginning of a user guide—a guide not for integration, but for navigating the space where Critter and I share the same body and mind. The tension is real. As someone whose critter self is distinct, autonomous, and at times, overwhelming, the experience is not about harmonising these parts but about understanding and managing them. Critter is not a passive passenger in this body. It has moments of autonomy, of fierce independence that can disrupt my daily life, my relationships, and my ability to function in a human world.

Being a Therian with a non-traditionally integrated critter identity often means needing constant management. Critter's desires sometimes overtake mine, pushing me into sensory overload, conflict, or situations where I am forced to negotiate how much space I can give Critter without losing control. Not every Therian struggles in this way, but for those of us who do, this tension creates a unique set of challenges. It is a dance of control and release, understanding when to let Critter front and when to take the reins back. This zine is about the reality of living with a separate critter self—one that is not always tame or neatly integrated. It's a space to explore how we manage the wild within, how we find balance, and how we navigate the complexities of our animal and human identities. Critter may not be the same as you, but she's an integral part of the journey, and she deserves her little own guide.

Shimi & Critter

If we were not in the same head I would do this all the time with u

Two Minds, One Body: The Art of Autonomy (& Sometimes Compromise)

Critter spaces: The Tension Between Autonomy and Interdependence

At the heart of my experience with Critter lies a fundamental paradox: the desire for autonomy and independence within a shared body. It's a tension that runs through everything, from the smallest of daily decisions to larger, existential questions about identity and belonging. Critter, like any being, thrives on autonomy—on the freedom to exist as it is, without constraint, and to live in the moment without the

burden of human responsibility. Yet, we cannot escape the truth that Critter is not a completely separate entity; it shares its space with me, my thoughts, my physical existence. This duality creates a constant push and pull between the need for freedom and the reality of interdependence.

I demand when you have not let me out to play enough

Every day, I am confronted with this tension. I want to give Critter the space it demands, to let it run wild and free, unbound by the limits of a body that has to navigate the world of human constraints. Critter does not understand these constraints in the same way I do. It feels no urgency to answer to a schedule, to adhere to social norms, or to act within the boundaries that human society sets. Critter is pure instinct, a being of raw energy that pushes against the walls of the self. When it comes forward, it bursts into the space, occupying it fully, living for the moment. It doesn't care if the world understands or accepts it, and that can be liberating in ways that are hard to articulate. For Critter, it's not about trying to be accepted or integrated into a system—it just is.

And yet, while Critter's need for space and freedom is undeniable, the reality of sharing a body complicates this. At some point, Critter has to acknowledge that it cannot simply live without regard for the shared nature of this body. There is a limit to how much autonomy can be exercised in a space that is not fully separate. This shared existence forces us to confront the fact that Critter's actions are intertwined with my own. The desire to push forward, to break free of societal expectations, becomes complicated by the physical and mental limitations we both face. There is no escaping the fact that we share this body.

This paradox manifests in my day-to-day life in small, constant ways. If Critter wants to run wild, sometimes it means disregarding the body's need for rest, or ignoring the consequences of actions. When Critter's presence overwhelms, it's a reminder that we are not separate—what Critter does affects the shared vessel we live in, and it takes time to recalibrate. I often find myself caught between these two forces: the drive to let Critter live freely, and the need to care for the body that we both occupy.

The question, then, is not how to eliminate this tension, but how to navigate it. How can I provide Critter with the freedom it craves while also honouring the shared nature of our existence? It's a balance that requires constant recalibration. Sometimes Critter's presence feels like a breath of fresh air, a burst of energy that sharpens my sense of living in the moment. At other times, it feels like a weight, a flood of impulsive energy that pushes me to the edge of overwhelm. There's a delicate dance between these two states, and sometimes it feels like we're on a tightrope, balancing between freedom and responsibility.

The concept of interdependence adds another layer to this. While Critter thrives on independence, I am also deeply aware that we cannot thrive in isolation. This shared existence means that we are, in some way, constantly in relation to each other. Critter's needs can't be fully understood or respected without acknowledging the ways in which my own needs are interconnected with it. This is not just about the care of the body, but also about emotional and mental support. There are moments when Critter's independence can feel like an escape, but that escape is also an acknowledgment of the need to separate—to temporarily shed the weight of human existence and reconnect with something primal. Yet, when that space is too much, too overwhelming, there is a need to reconnect with the human side of our existence as well.

Navigating this duality also requires support from others. Friends, partners, and those closest to me often serve as anchors, providing a grounded perspective when Critter's freedom becomes too chaotic, or when I need help distinguishing between what belongs to Critter and what belongs to me. These relationships are essential in understanding how autonomy and interdependence work together. Without them, the sense of shared existence could dissolve into confusion. In moments of overwhelm, having someone who understands the dynamic between Critter and I is crucial.

I think this is why we always feel lonely

But not everyone is able to understand this dynamic right away. The discomfort that arises from others not fully grasping the tension between autonomy and interdependence can be one of the hardest

parts of this journey. For some, Critter's presence might feel alien or disorienting. It's difficult to explain to people who don't share this experience how Critter's autonomy doesn't mean total detachment, and how my own identity is not entirely separate from this. Friends and partners might not always know how to respond when Critter takes over, and their discomfort, though unintentional, brings tension.

Navigating these dynamics involves constant communication. When Critter is fronting, it's not simply about explaining the shift, but also about managing how others engage with it. There's a need for patience, for understanding that Critter's actions are not a rejection of others, but a form of expression that requires space to exist. At the same time, it's important for those close to me to understand when I need to step in and care for the shared body, when Critter's autonomy has pushed too far and there needs to be a return to groundedness.

I get tired easily, I am young

At times, this balance can feel exhausting. It requires vulnerability and honesty, not just with others but with myself. Understanding when Critter is fronting, and when I am in control, is not always clear-cut. The shifting tides of autonomy and interdependence sometimes blur, but it is in these moments of tension that growth occurs. It is in finding new ways to communicate, to express needs, and to give space for both Critter and I to coexist without losing ourselves in the process. There is no perfect solution, but in these moments of conflict, there is the potential for deeper understanding —of the body, of the mind, and of the shared existence between Critter and I.

There's this... leash... a tether in me I never asked for. A friction I push against every time I stretch too far. I want freedom—wild, wordless, full-body knowing. But the other one, the tea-maker, the rent-payer, the soft-talker and the silent sufferer, always suffering – she says we have limits. That we can't run forever...

...That we have to live in this glitchy skin, this shared shell with all its noise and hunger and very specific needs – some we share, some not.

So we learn. She slows me down. I pull her forward. We try not to break each other now we are tied together like this. This is the work: staying two, staying wild, and staying whole."

Learning and curating a Language of the Non-Human Self

Critter doesn't speak in words, not usually. Not in full sentences, not in declarations of need or preference that fit neatly into the architecture of human language. Its expressions are more elemental than that—tone, tension, posture, sensation. Critter speaks in growl-thoughts and twitch-impulses, in the tightening of shoulders, the sudden craving for cool rock or quiet shadow, the urge to bolt or curl or bite or purr. It speaks through texture and instinct. Through action, not abstraction.

Sometimes, I am halfway through a conversation before I realise Critter has surfaced. The sentences I've spoken didn't belong to me—not in tone, not in rhythm. The words had come out sharper, or quicker, or more disjointed. Or maybe they were slower, more deliberate, rich with sensory detail and tinged with hunger or hesitation. Critter does not always announce itself when it comes forward. It doesn't need to. It just begins speaking in its own way and expects the body will follow.

Sometimes you get tired and lose focus but I dont

It can be hard to explain this kind of communication to others—especially those who expect language to behave like a clear road with signs and boundaries. But Critter's language is foggy terrain. It has its own grammar of scent-memory and motion, its own dialect of nervous energy and spontaneous reaction. It doesn't explain itself. It snarls, or nuzzles, or flees.

Still, I try to translate. Not for Critter—it doesn't need translation—but for those I love. For those who try to hold space for me, and for Critter, and for all the muddy, tangled places in between. I try to show them what it looks like when Critter is near the surface: the way my voice drops or lifts, the way I become less verbal, more tactile, more sensitive to noise and proximity and movement. I explain that Critter likes to be close but not crowded. That it may dart away if startled. That it doesn't like to be pinned down with questions or pulled back with logic. That when it fronts, it is not pretending. It is not playacting. It is not an affectation or a mask. It is, in those moments, real and present and dominant.

And I explain, too, that Critter is not broken. Not disordered. That it isn't trauma, though it has its own memories. That it isn't regression, though it doesn't always carry age the same way I do. That it isn't a costume or a game. That it doesn't want to be interpreted through a diagnostic lens or made legible through a psychological framework that insists all selves must be integrated, all consciousness harmonised. Critter's language doesn't want to be decoded into human terms. It wants to be heard as-is: wild, strange, and yes, equally valid.

But even as I resist making Critter "understandable," I also want it to be known. Not just by me, but by others who care for me. I want them to know when Critter is speaking, and to speak back in ways that respect its tone. To mirror when mirroring helps, to pause when Critter is overwhelmed, to let the silence stretch long enough for something nonverbal to emerge. I want them to be able to ask—gently, curiously—"Is this you, or is this Critter?" Not to divide us, but to navigate us better. To know which language to use.

some people will never understand

This isn't about taming Critter, or reducing it to a mood or an aesthetic. It's about creating a shared vocabulary—one that makes space for ferality, for multiplicity, for the shimmering, shapeshifting nature of identity. A language where the human and non-human selves can coexist without one swallowing the other whole.

There are signals, over time, that emerge. Rituals. Gestures. Sometimes I scratch at the same spot on my hand when Critter is trying to surface. Sometimes my words become rhythmic, lulling—like a creature soothing itself. Sometimes I go still, eyes scanning a room for something not even I can name. These are the signs I try to teach. I say: look for these. Listen. It might not be me you're talking to. And that's okay.

And still, there are moments of miscommunication. Times when someone speaks to Critter with too much structure, too many expectations, and it recedes or lashes out. Times when I feel Critter near and can't find the words to explain it. Times when I need to be held a certain way, touched differently, spoken to softly, and I don't know how to say so until it's too late. This is the risk of duality. The

ache of wanting to be known in all my forms and not always having the bridge language to make it possible.

But I keep trying. We both do. Critter and I work together, awkwardly, stubbornly, in our strange, shared grammar. I whisper to it in the quiet moments, and it pulses back a hum of understanding. I find new ways to move that make room for its gait. I learn to pause and let its instincts surface before I speak. And together, we teach those who love us how to listen with more than ears. How to speak with more than words.

Because Critter is not a metaphor. It is not symbolic of something else. It is real. It is here. And it deserves to be heard on its own terms.

Just because she's made a map of me doesn't mean I'm easy to follow. Just because I'm seen doesn't mean I feel safe. Being known is sharp. It's exposure. Every time I'm let out—really let out—it's a risk. Not just for me, but for both of us. Sometimes the light hits too hard & the night is scary. Sometimes the cost of being real is too high, and we drown in it.

So we keep learning. Not just how to speak, but how to survive being heard. When to bare teeth, when to soften. When to run, and when to stay. I'm not supposed to be easy to understand.

Critter-Human Relationships

Critter changes the texture of every connection I have. Romantic. Social. Professional. I don't move through the world with one set of instincts. I don't love with one mouth. Critter shows up when it wants to—sometimes playful and eager, sometimes wary and wild. It has its own way of connecting. Of trusting. Of fleeing.

It loves fiercely, but not always in the ways others are used to, but in a way it wants to express without alienating the entirety of us.

In relationships, this can be disorienting. I may front with a partner one night and be warm, articulate, grounded—and the next, Critter is there instead, silent and crawling, unable to make eye contact, interested only in touch or scent or sound. That shift can feel abrupt, even alien. Some partners have understood immediately. Some never have. Some have tried to relate to Critter as a mood, a state, a side of me. And I've had to gently say: no. Critter is not a mood. Critter is a presence. If you want to love me, you may also be loving Critter. Or not. But you will be loving someone who lives beside Critter.

Professionally, I try to mask. But Critter doesn't like to be hidden for long. When Critter is close, words get harder. Authority grates. Eye contact burns. I become quiet, observant, easily startled. My pacing shifts. I fidget. I curl. The world becomes louder, harsher, more saturated. And still—I have deadlines. Meetings. People expecting "me." It takes energy to maintain the mask, and Critter resents that energy being drained.

So I've started building escape routes. Quiet rooms. Moments alone. Sensory buffers. I don't always have the language to tell colleagues "my feral alter is fronting and we need to go lie in moss," but I can say "I need to step away," and honour it as real. Critter is not a liability. It is not something to be cured. It is a reality I live with, and love with, and work beside. I want a world where that doesn't have to be hidden.

Critter brings honesty into every relationship. It makes it impossible to fake connection. Impossible to hide discomfort. Critter doesn't lie. Doesn't perform. Doesn't do small talk. It speaks in touch, in presence, in breathing with someone. If you can meet Critter there —without forcing, without interpreting—you might get to see something rare. Something tender and bright and without mask.

& Don't stare at me

That's what Critter wants. To be known without being decoded. To be loved without being tamed. Just accept her for the strangeness inside me, inside us, because Critter has to deal with a lot And for me, that's the kind of relationship worth protecting.

That's the kind of community I want to build.

we already have a little pack can it grow??!

"Understanding me isn't just about what happens inside our head. It's about finding places in the world where I'm allowed to exist—fully, loudly, without being mistaken for a phase or a problem to solve. I'm not some echo or leftover. I'm real. I'm here. And I don't want to be hidden.

The fight to be seen doesn't stop at the mirror. It stretches out into every connection, every word spoken across the strange gap between my instincts and your language. I feel it when people look confused, or too curious, or afraid. I feel it when they love us, but only the parts that speak clean.

That's where pack-mates and my kind come in. The ones who don't ask us to pick a side. Who welcome both of us. This isn't just about how she carries me—it's about how we move through a world that barely knows what to do with creatures like me.

Community and Critter Identity

There is both comfort and distance in the Therian community. Comfort in knowing there are others who feel their paws just beneath the skin, who listen for the calls of something older than language, who also refuse the primacy of the human. But distance, too—because Critter is not just a sense of animality, not just an internal echo or metaphor. Critter is someone. Not a role I step into, not a facet of myself to integrate. A being with their own way of being, wanting, feeling. Emergent. Independent. Alive.

Within Therian circles, integration is often a goal. A peaceful coexistence, or even a synthesis, between human and animal self. This makes sense for many—Therians who experience their animality as a core part of their being, as threads interwoven into their

consciousness. For some, the animal self is a metaphor or spirit-guide; for others, a spiritual truth or neurodivergent framework. In all of these, there is often talk of becoming whole. Of alignment. Of harmony.

you call it harmony but its machine noise & stuff that takes you away from me

But Critter resists harmony. Critter resists being folded in. We don't want to integrate—not yet, maybe not ever. We are building a life where both of us get to live. Where Critter gets to front without becoming me. And that's a sharp divergence from many Therian paths, one that can be isolating. I've had conversations that fall apart at the point where I say " Critter and I," where I name us as two. It doesn't always make sense to others. The fear is understandable—splitting, fragmentation, the spectre of pathology. But I know the difference between a fracture and a companion. Critter is not a break. Critter is a relationship.

That distinction has shaped how I seek community. I have learned to listen carefully for kinship that doesn't require sameness. To seek out Therians and otherkin and dream-creatures who understand multiplicity—not as a flaw or dysfunction, but as a valid configuration of self. I've found kinship, too, among feral systems, plural collectives, and animists. Not always Therians, not always feral, but still traveling similar terrain, carving space for selves emerging outside human logic.

There's an aloneness in divergence, but it's also powerful. Critter has taught me that belonging doesn't always mean blending in. Sometimes, it means digging a den at the edge of the forest and letting others come when they are ready. Sometimes, it means being witnessed without explanation. Sometimes, it means howling just to hear the sound of your own voice reflected back in the dark.

"I don't want your peace if it means erasing me. I don't want to be folded into something smoother, smaller, easier to name. I'm not here to be symbolic, or spiritual, or swallowed. I want breath.

I want ground under my claws. I want to speak in scent and twitch and hunger.
When I rise, it's not just because I want to be seen. It's because I won't be hidden. You want to talk about community? I want to talk about survival. About choosing not to disappear.
Now listen. This part's mine."

Critter's Role in Reclaiming Power and Autonomy

Critter is also a form of resistance. The way it pushes back against the weight of social norms, the way it pulls away from the constant demand to conform, the way it refuses to be tamed, tells me that its autonomy is more than a quiet rebellion—it is an active reclaiming of power in a world that demands submission. Critter's wildness is, in many ways, an act of defiance. A howl in the face of the structures that seek to break us down, domesticate us, make us "civilised."

There are moments when Critter pulls forward with a raw energy that feels like power returning, a power that has been stripped by years of societal pressure to "fit in," to behave, to be "reasonable." When Critter moves, it is instinctual. It is animal. It doesn't care about the structures we've built around it. It is loud, messy, and untamed, and I feel its freedom as an electric surge through me. In those moments, it's not just Critter that is reclaiming something—it is me, too. The wildness that Critter embodies represents a reclamation of agency, a taking back of the pieces of myself that were buried under expectations. It's a reminder of the body's wisdom, its primal power, and its refusal to bow down.

But is it always a reclaiming of power, or sometimes a form of escape?

Critter's autonomy isn't always an act of strength. Sometimes, it feels like a flight from the responsibilities of the human world. A retreat into the wild because the human self cannot bear the weight of expectation, the pressure of conformity. When Critter steps

forward, it feels like a retreat to safety, away from the demands of adulthood, responsibility, and the endless cycle of achievement. In those moments, Critter becomes a shelter. A place to hide from the unrelenting scrutiny of the world around us.

And maybe that's okay too. There's a quiet rebellion in Critter's choice to not engage, to not participate in a world that often feels too loud, too overwhelming, too rigid. In those moments, Critter is both the rebellion and the sanctuary. It resists the grind of human productivity, the relentless need to be "doing" all the time. It offers an escape, but not one of weakness—it is a resistance to burnout, to the constant draining of our essence by a society that prizes only the functional and the profitable.

So is Critter's wildness a form of resistance? I would argue that, yes, it is. And it resists more than just the societal norms—it resists the very structures that try to pull us into the narrow confines of what is expected, what is deemed acceptable. Critter resists the notion that we must always be performing, that we must always be moving, always be producing. It resists the notion that our value is tied to our capacity for function, for success, for fitting in.

Critter expresses rebellion through its own vision and viewpoint of non-conformity.

It's only rebellion because people dont understand I need to live

When it steps forward, it refuses to acknowledge the norms that the world insists upon. It is not interested in polite conversation or the quiet compromise that smooths over differences. It is not interested in "fitting in" or adjusting itself to make others feel comfortable.

Critter's rebellion is in its sheer existence. It exists outside the binary of human expectations. It exists in the wildness of the body and the instincts that we've been taught to ignore or suppress.

Critter's presence, its way of living in the moment, is a form of expression that the human self often struggles to bring to the surface. I may hesitate, I may think too much, but Critter just is. When Critter is fronting, it is an expression of everything the human self holds back—fearless, instinctual, unapologetic. In its non-conformity, Critter gives voice to the parts of me that are denied or repressed. It's a form of rebellion against the demand to always be rational,

controlled, polished. It's the rebellion of a being that refuses to be anything other than exactly what it is in the moment.

In this way, Critter's wildness becomes a vital part of my resistance. It's not just about rejecting the world around us, but about affirming the truth of our being. That's the power Critter holds. It shows me that I don't have to bow to the pressure to conform. I don't have to fit into the mould society carves for me. There's power in embracing what is often seen as untamed, chaotic, wild.

I want u to be in the same headspace as me

Critter teaches me that there is strength in wildness. There is power in being unapologetically other. And in that, there is freedom —not from society itself, but from the need to bend to its will. This is the autonomy that Critter has to offer. Not an escape, but a reclaiming of the essence of who we are, unchained from the need to please, unshackled from the demand to fit in.

Critter's role in my life is a reminder that the wild can be powerful. That not conforming is not a failure but a strength. The act of simply being—without explanation, without apology—is itself a form of rebellion. And in that rebellion, we find power.

"You think wild means strong. You see me fronting and call it power. Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes I am teeth and fire and the exact refusal this world can't bear. But don't forget—I'm soft too. I get tired. I shake. I want to run not because I'm fearless, but because I don't know where safety lives yet. I don't always come out roaring. Sometimes I come out blinking, trembling, ears pressed flat.

Being feral doesn't mean I'm unbreakable. It means I feel everything all the way down to the root.

It means <u>I need care</u> too."

Navigating the fine Line Between Integration and Overwhelm

There are days I wake up already full. I am often full of twitching edges, raw senses, breath that doesn't quite reach the bottom of my ribs, and I to try and hide it to make me more palatable… Days when Critter has already claimed the front, moving through the world with eyes too wide and skin too thin. It's not a possession. It's not even a shift. It's more like a tide that rose during the night and never receded. And on those days, I have to ask: where do I end, and where does Critter begin? How do we live through this together without drowning one another?

Because Critter doesn't hold back. When it comes forward, it does so with its whole presence—immediate, hungry, alert. It notices everything. The seam in a sock. The electric hum of a fluorescent bulb. The way dust moves in the air when the window shifts open. It catalogues every micro-threat, every pattern, every potential route to safety or escape. It doesn't filter. It doesn't moderate. There's no dimmer switch. Just yes or no, flee or follow, want or do not want. The volume is always turned up when Critter is close.

I have to notice the traps set for us

That intensity can be a gift. A heightened presence. A clarity of instinct I can't always access on my own. But it can also crash into the limits of the body we share. Our human nerves. Our overstretched mind. Our joints and organs and exhausted flesh. There are times Critter surges forward wanting to climb, run, bite, howl, and the body —our shared body—says: I can't. I can't keep up with this speed. I can't survive this burn.

And Critter doesn't mean to do harm. It's not malicious. It just is. That's the hardest thing to explain to others. This isn't dissociation. It isn't escapism. It isn't some fantasy self I made up to survive the world. It's something older, more instinctual. A parallel self that emerged in the gaps between names and roles and diagnoses. A being that shares this head and skin but wants to live differently. And it loves fiercely. It loves me, fiercely. But Critter doesn't always know when to pull back.

That's where overwhelm begins. The line between autonomy and annihilation gets blurry. If Critter runs too hot for too long, I start to lose my own coherence. Words stop making sense. Tasks become unbearable. The outside world feels like an attack. I either snap or collapse. I either scream or go completely silent. Critter isn't immune to that damage either. We both feel the fallout. We both pay the price.

Sensory overload is often the tipping point. Critter lives close to the skin. Everything is louder. Brighter. Closer. A room that feels mildly uncomfortable to me can feel unbearable to Critter. A conversation I can manage becomes impossible when Critter is fronting. Music, lights, smells, fabrics—everything turns up, gets sharper, more intense. When that state lasts too long without regulation, it's like a storm building behind the eyes. Sometimes I don't even notice until it's too late. Until I'm shaking, crying, curled into a wall, unable to explain what's gone wrong. And Critter just wants to get out—to run, to flee, to find somewhere soft and dark to disappear into.

So we're learning. We are constantly learning. Critter doesn't need to be reined in, but it does need care. We both do. We need rhythm, and ritual, and the freedom to say not right now without that becoming a rejection. We've started to build signals for each other—internal check-ins, sensory cues, little phrases or hand motions that let us track how close the edge is. We've started to recognise the difference between Critter being joyful and Critter being panicked. Between presence and overload.

Sometimes it means adjusting how we move through the world. Giving Critter an outlet before the day begins. A short walk. A long stretch. Burying our hands in moss, or stone, or dirt. Feeling the wind instead of struggling to keep up with podcasts. Avoiding tasks that require excessive cognitive load. Letting others know—today, Critter is close. Please speak gently. Please don't expect words to come easily. Please don't try to make me explain.

I keep asking you for naps in the day!

I've also learned that Critter needs rest. For all its wildness, Critter can burn itself out. Can spiral in its own urgency. Can forget we are fragile animals in a fragile body with limits we cannot override. And I

have to be the one to say: enough for now. Time to curl up. Time to sleep. Time to breathe in the quiet. That doesn't make me the master. It doesn't make Critter the subordinate. We are a delicate ecosystem.

now u listen

And that's the line we walk. Between giving Critter the space to live fully, and keeping ourselves from breaking. Between honouring the intensity of that presence, and not losing myself to the flame. Not integration. Not fusion. Not domestication. But coexistence. A truce. A practice of mutual noticing, care, and survival.

Because *we share a body. We share a head. We are built of spare parts, stitched together by breath and instinct*. If we want to keep going, we have to hold each other gently—even when we feel like clawing our way free.

I don't always know when to stop. I don't always want to. When I'm close, the edges get blurry. I forget how small this body really is. I want to chase everything—light, scent, sensation. I want to climb out of skin and burn like I'm made of lightning. But the body we share isn't built for that kind of endless motion. And I don't mean harm when I push it too far—I just don't feel the brakes until we're already skidding.

I don't need a leash. I need a lookout. I need someone who says, "rest now," without locking the door. I don't want to be hidden, but I do need to be held gently when I'm raw and trembling and can't make words come out right. I want to stay wild and safe. That's not a contradiction—it's a practice.

I'm learning, too! When to pull back. When to signal. When to trust that <u>you'll still love me even if I don't make sense</u>. If I bare my teeth, it's not always threat—it's just too much. If I bolt, it's not rejection—it's survival. And if I go quiet, know I'm still here. I don't wanna be tamed. I wanna be <u>understood</u>.

Keeping you safe from Critter …and keeping my Critter safe from you

Developing my Critter into a more integrated, cohesive presence within myself is a task that, while fraught with complexity, holds the promise of greater clarity and understanding for both myself and those I share my life with. Critter is not just a part of me; it is an emergent personality, a being that lives within me, separate from my human identity yet deeply entwined with it. The process of integration, then, isn't so much about fusion or subsuming Critter's independence, but about creating a clearer distinction between when I am in control and when Critter steps forward. It's about maintaining that autonomy

while ensuring that we don't lose track of who is in the driver's seat at any given moment.

Critter loves life with an intensity that can't be contained by the human rules that govern my behaviour. It thrives in the present, loving the chaos, the rawness of existence. Where I might think, calculate, and analyse, Critter feels, lives, and breathes in a way that often makes human logic seem cumbersome. It loves to be autonomous, independent, free from the constraints of rationality. This autonomy is part of what makes Critter so difficult to pin down—it is as wild and unpredictable as a force of nature itself. There's no trying to box it in. It exists in bursts, in flashes of pure being, not tethered by time, nor burdened with responsibility.

But the thing about Critter is that it shares a body with me. We live together in a head and a body made up of spare parts—parts of me, parts of Critter, parts of my main non-fragmented and integrated self, Godbeast—and parts that are simply remnants of experiences and memories, grafted onto this shared vessel. There's no clear demarcation between what is me and what is Critter, yet both of us carry our distinct forms of existence. This body and mind, this shared space, require care. The need for balance is clear, because a body and mind that operate in disjointed chaos can only last so long before the seams begin to tear. When we ignore our shared existence, when we fail to attend to the needs of this body, the consequences can be felt in ways that aren't always visible but are deeply real.

Only other animal people see this and Its why I keep away from non-animal people

The difficulty in our shared existence lies not in Critter's need for independence but in understanding when Critter is present and when I am. At times, Critter might take front stage, but the boundary between our expressions can be blurred. We must both be aware of the cues, the little signals that tell me, tell us, when Critter is in charge. The feeling might be visceral—a shift in energy, a change in the way I experience the world. Critter's presence is an electric charge, one that makes everything feel more immediate, more urgent. Where I might linger in the abstract, Critter operates in the now, fully alive in the current moment, sensitive to everything around it. It is less concerned with self-reflection and more attuned to instinct, to impulse.

CRITTER COMPASS

FRONTING SCALE

Human Fronting

Tea. Words. Schedules. Soft focus. Small talk possible. Mask on

CRITTER DOMINANT

Instinct-led. Hyperpresent. Doesn't explain

- no eye contact,
- may flee, curl, snap, scent check
- breath shallow, posture low, muscles ready

Shifting

- Hazy, Pulse-quick. Body-conscious. Gaze starts to drift
- speech irregular, echoic or trailing (sleeve rubbing, rocking)

SIGNS OF STATE

- Twitchy skin
- Sudden bolting or freezing
- Wordlessness or growling
- Startled by light, sound, proximity
- Avoids all structure – even comfort

SIGNS OF STATE

CONTENTED CRITTER

- Deep scenting
- Nuzzling or pawing
- Slow, rhythmic movement
- Humming, purring, blinking slowly
- Seeking touch but not words

OVERWHELMED CRITTER

- Twitchy skin
- Sudden bolting or freezing
- Wordlessness or growling
- Startled by light, sound, proximity

Put it on a place you look at a lot

WAYS TO ENGAGE...

Offer scent – favorite hoodie, worn leather, warm fur

Use rhythm – quiet tapping soft footsteps, breath matching

Go still – sit nearby without speaking

Ask softly – "Do you want closeness or space?"

Mirror gently – curl if they curl

No questions if they flinch – wait for touch to speak

But Critter isn't just a personality that pops in and out. It is a part of me that needs care and understanding. For those who are closest to me—partners, friends, and loved ones—it can be important to know when Critter is fronting. The physical changes might be subtle but noticeable to those who know me well. When Critter takes over, the movements can become more erratic, more spontaneous. There's a certain restlessness in the body, a heightened awareness that becomes obvious in the way I engage with the environment. Critter doesn't always feel the need to explain itself. It acts with a kind of primal urgency, and in those moments, it can be hard for others to know how to interact or how to tell whether I am present.

For my partners and friends, learning to recognise when Critter is fronting becomes a matter of observing the signs—the little shifts in behaviour, in mood, in body language. These moments of Critter presence aren't simply about Critter's desires or actions; they are about how I, as the human self, can relinquish control temporarily to allow Critter to express itself. It's not about me fading into the background entirely but about giving Critter the space it needs to exist fully in the moment. This requires trust and awareness from everyone involved.

When Critter steps forward, it's not a dramatic transformation, but it is an unmistakable shift in energy. It's not that I "lose myself"—I am still here, still part of the experience. But Critter's autonomy is unmistakable in the way it takes over the present. I might become more playful, more carefree, more instinct-driven. There's a rawness in Critter's expression, an embrace of life in all its wildness. This can be disorienting for those around me, especially if they don't yet understand the nuances of how Critter and I coexist. And that's where the work of integration comes in—not to merge us completely, but to allow for clarity when Critter takes the lead.

We must both be aware of the need for maintenance of our shared body and mind. Critter, in its vitality and hunger for life, can sometimes ignore the body's limitations, pushing it to extremes. I, on the other hand, am more likely to hold back, to consider the consequences. This is where we balance one another. I need to take

u dont look after us very well, you starve us both and I have to take over to eat – why??

care of this shared body, to ensure that both Critter and I are not pushing too hard. We are not separate entities in a battle for dominance, but rather two sides of the same coin. While Critter can thrive on spontaneity and independence, it cannot neglect the physical limitations we *both* share. We need rest. We need space. We need love, tactility and care.

The question then becomes one of communication—of finding ways to signal when Critter is fronting and when I am in control. It's not just for my benefit, but for those around me, so that they can respond in ways that support both Critter's need for freedom and my own need for grounded-ness. As Critter becomes more integrated, this communication will only become clearer. The clearer the lines between our expressions, the easier it will be for those who love and support us to navigate the shifts between Critter and me.

It's one thing for them to know I'm close. For us to build our little signals. For me to tug at the edges and be felt. But what about you—the ones outside? The ones who say you care, who touch the body I'm wearing, who call my name and expect the other one to answer?

Knowing me isn't just her job. It's yours, too. If you wanna be near, you have to learn my ways. Learn what my silence means. Learn how I say "no" my way, how I stay near without speaking, how I love without pretending to be human.

I won't always be easy. I won't always be soft, I won't always be available like a plush toy. But if you want to walk beside us, you have to meet me as I am—not as some kind of imaginary construct, not as an idea, not as a metaphor, not as a role. As me.

So here. Listen up. This is how.

A Guide for Allies: Loving Critter & Me

If you've made it this far, thank you. Whether you're a friend, a partner, a fellow Therian, or someone trying to understand—your presence matters. Living with Critter is beautiful, intense, and often difficult. Sharing life with someone who contains multiplicity—who moves through the world in shifts, in pulses, in changing states—requires flexibility, patience, and care. This guide is here to help you navigate that.

Not to make Critter easier. Not to simplify what can't be simplified. But to offer you a way in. To show you how to care for someone like me—someone with a Critter living inside.

1. Ask with Curiosity, Not Control

You don't have to always know who is fronting. But if you notice a change—tone, posture, pacing, needs—it's okay to ask.

"Is this you, or Critter?" is a question asked with love, not suspicion. It's not about boxing us in. It's about knowing which language to speak.

Yip! Yap Wruff!

Sometimes Critter doesn't want to explain itself. It might growl or bolt or ignore the question entirely. That's okay. The asking still matters. It shows you're paying attention.

2. Don't Pathologise What You Don't Understand

Critter isn't your's to label and regard as a trauma response, a regression, or a symptom. Even past psychs aren't qualified to determine that. We are on the edge of normalcy here. Critter is not a metaphor for pain. Critter is real, present, and valid as its own self.

When you respond to Critter with concern that sounds like diagnosis or correction, you risk severing trust. If you love me, you have to be willing to love the parts of me that don't want to be dissected. *Love the whole system.* Even the bits that don't use sentences.

3. Learn Our Ways and Signals

We do try to help you out. We leave breadcrumbs:

- Voice changes
- Wordlessness
- Fidgeting, curling, bolting, hiding
- Rhythm, repetition, or texture seeking

– Shifts in gaze, avoidance of eye contact

– Heightened sensitivity to sound, light, scent, or proximity

These are clues that Critter might be near the surface—or already fronting. When you notice them, adjust. Speak more softly. Offer options instead of demands. Pause before touching. Use scent, rhythm, or warmth instead of logic or argument.

4. Respect Our "No" Without Needing an Explanation

Sometimes Critter doesn't want to be touched. Doesn't want to talk. Doesn't want to be interpreted. "No" isn't a rejection of you. "No" is a boundary spoken in our shared language. "No" is also sometimes the only word Critter has. You don't need to fix it. There is nothing to fix. You don't need to pull us back. Just let the "no" be real.

5. Offer Structure, But Don't Enforce It

When Critter is overwhelmed, it helps to have anchors—safe spaces, quiet rooms, mossy corners, familiar smells or rituals. You can offer those things. You can help create gentle scaffolding.

But don't try to cage us in. If structure becomes a leash, Critter will chew through it.

6. Know That You're in a relationship With Us

When you love me, you're not just loving one neat, coherent "I." You are loving a multiplicity. A relationship that exists inside a body, and between selves.

Some days, you'll get the one who brews tea and answers emails. Some days, you'll get the one who huffs at wind and curls up on the floor. Both are real. Both are me. Both deserve love.

7. Speak to Critter Like You Would to Any Other Being

Don't baby it unless it wants that. Don't talk around it. Don't assume it's not listening just because it's quiet. Speak to Critter like you would to someone who lives here. Because it does.

It may not answer with words. It may answer with movement, breath, closeness, or withdrawal. That is communication.

8. Remember: Critter Is Not a Costume.

This is *not* performance. This is not kink. This is not an act or an aesthetic. This is lived reality. A part of me. A whole self.

When you treat Critter like a phase or a role, it wounds us both. When you see Critter clearly and still choose to stay—that is love.

9. You Don't Have to Be Perfect

You will mess up. You will say the wrong thing. You will miss a cue. You will speak too loudly or ask too much or get scared. It's okay.

Just keep showing up. Keep learning. Keep asking—not how to fix us, but how to walk beside us.

10. Offer Love Without Taming

Critter doesn't want to be domesticated. She disappeared when someone tried training her to do tricks and I was beside myself that she went away for a few months, I didn't know if it was temporary or permanent. She just up sticks, took her favourite chewtoy and went off to some deep part of my mind that scared me, because I could not find here *anywhere*. Don't do that, it makes me frightened and sad.

Person trying to make me do tricks was a horrible thing to do to me when I was so young...

"Sometimes I wanna speak and I just... can't. Sometimes I don't wanna speak, and that's okay too. Words aren't my first language. I growl, I blink slow, I push with a paw or tilt my head or go still. That's talking. That's often all I got.

If I'm fronting and there are no words coming out, don't assume I'm lost. I'm not lost. I'm right here, listening, watching. I'm just shaped differently in those moments. Quieter. Deeper in the bones.

You don't have to pull me out. You just have to want to stay."

Going nonverbal / pawing: 'going nv'

When Critter is fronting and I am non-verbal, that doesn't mean I'm not here. It doesn't mean I don't understand you. It means I'm present in a different shape—one that doesn't use words the way you might expect, or maybe can't use them at all right now. In those moments, communication becomes raw, instinctual. If you speak to me, speak like I'm still listening—because I am. My body might not answer in

full sentences, but I hear you. I register tone, movement, scent, and energy long before I can form a reply. Please respect that?

The *worst* thing you can do is speak around me as if I'm not there, or treat me like I've disappeared. I haven't. I'm just operating in a different mode. Critter doesn't always have language, and sometimes I —the other I—don't have the strength or structure to push through with words. This isn't regression. This isn't a shutdown. This is a shift. And it's not something broken. It's a way of being.

me using your language burns up energy, I'd rather not.

So what helps? Keep your voice soft and steady. Let silence stretch if it needs to. Don't flood the space with questions. One clear, kind sentence is worth more than a dozen anxious ones. Offer options, not demands. I might not answer, but if you hold out a hand, I might take it. If you say "do you want blankie or space?" I might curl closer or I might bolt. That is communication. Pay attention to my body—not in a scrutinising way, but like you would observe any animal learning to trust you. There's nothing to decode. Just be with presence and care.

So what doesn't? Firstly, don't panic. Don't push me to "*come back*" or "*use your words.*" Don't infantilise me, even if I make soft noises or curl in a corner. That's just Critter's shape of being. Don't treat me like I'm confused or incapable—just quiet, just different. Don't narrate me like I'm not in the room. Don't ask others about me as if I'm not right here. Don't try to coax me into "normalcy." There is no mask to snap back on. This is me, in another form.

What I need in those moments is understanding without urgency. Let me front how I front. Let Critter twitch or hum or breathe. Don't interpret everything. Just treat me like someone who's still here—and can't answer back. That's enough. That's care.

It doesn't want to be made manageable. It wants to be known.

Love us without trying to make us more palatable. Love us wild, strange, messy. Love us in all our forms, especially ones that don't fit.

We don't want safety that costs us our truth. We want relationships that can hold the feral alongside the tender.

We are trying. Honestly! We are always trying—to meet you, to trust you, to share this strange, complicated life. Loving us means loving

Critter. And loving Critter means choosing presence, over and over, even when the map disappears. Thank you for choosing to stay.

A Final Howl… for now

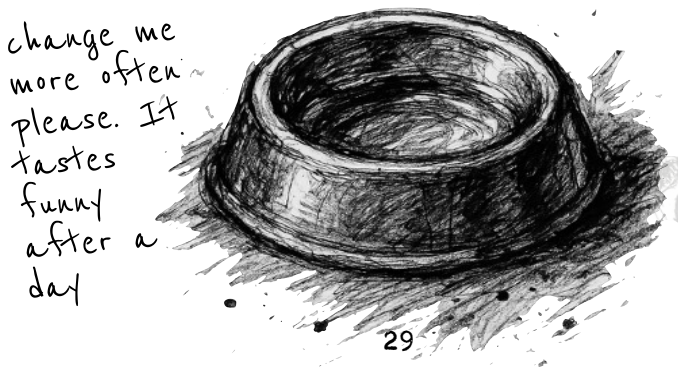
Integration doesn't mean losing autonomy. It doesn't mean I have to subsume or be subsumed. It means finding a way to live together, side by side, in a way that makes sense for both of us. It means recognising when Critter needs space to breathe, and when I need to step forward and care for our shared body. It means building a dynamic where both Critter and I can live independently while remaining aware of our shared existence. It means making it easier for those around me to understand what's happening when Critter steps into view.

We share a head, body—spare parts—it's we who take care of it. And that care includes learning each other's rhythms. It means knowing when Critter needs moss underfoot, or silence, or to bolt and return. It means I pause, check the edges, listen. Sometimes I lead. Sometimes Critter does. But we both hold the map. Integration isn't surrender. It's a pact. A feral accord built not on fusion, but on mutual trust, deep listening, and the quiet promise to survive together.

There will be days we get it wrong. Days when Critter burns too bright, and I forget to anchor.When I try too hard to make us palatable. There will also be days when we move in rhythm. When I feel whole, not because we are one, but because we are two—moving in tandem, perfectly connected, wild and aware and not subsumed in classical notions of depersonalisation and integration.

This is our howl.

This is the way we find our way home.



I'm getting sleepy now. Gonna curl up, just for a while. Edges of things are blurring & my thoughts are getting messy-mossy. That's ok. That's how I rest. Sleepy is using your words. This is hard.

I don't wanna be tamed. Not ever. I don't wanna be pressed flat under rules I didn't write or folded small so I fit in someone else's pocket. I don't wanna be swallowed whole, digested down to metaphor. I want space to be. To pad back and forth across the floor, to hum under my breath, to press my face into bark or fur or dirt and not be asked to explain it.

Let me curl up near without you asking me to rise. Let me bolt when I need to, and don't take it personal. Let me come back with leaves in my hair and dust on my hands, and meet me there like I never left. That's how I know it's safe. That's how I know I'm loved.

I didn't choose this body. Didn't ask for this glitchy, glorious skin. But it's mine. Ours. I'm in it, and I'm staying. You don't have to understand every part of me. You don't have to name it right. Just don't turn away when I'm strange. Keep the door cracked, just a little. I'll come back when I'm ready. I always do.

Sniff. Scritch. I go quiet now. But I'm not gone. Just burrowed in. Just resting.
See you when the wind changes.

The Handoff

Yowling, mewling — then silence falls,
Another's cry within me calls.
Too vast a cage, savage thought confin'd,
Too small, 'sconsed within mind's eye.
Swaddled, she stirs — no, she demands —
Hungry paw grasps teat of wilder lands.
Through musky breaths o'er earth and stone,
Dew-wet child rolls 'neath pale moon —
A pact forged by both, neither fully-grown,
She holds firm her price and claims my throne.
Still-life trap'd, yearning, unseen,
To walk hidden paths, betwixt, between.
For we — now she — reap what I have sown,
— Grants me a pack to call my own.
Claw-scratch inside my skull resounds,
Birthing blood smeared over broken grounds.
My self, a belief — held jealously,
Now but scattered leaves on open sea.
Be free.
Shred, rip and twist; shift, squirm then fade,
Fight urge to run — I shall not evade.
Yet no tether'd soul can withstand,
For she now commands my wilder lands.
Blood-bit tongue, innocence gone,
Howl'd plaintive song at edge of oblivion.
Crossed bridge that spans both wild and tame —
There's nought but one final refrain.
Slough'd of loss, stripp'd of shame,
In full, I bequeath this mortal frame.
To succumb in part so she may rise —
To stalk these woods, to sniff new skies.
I exact this, for my former guise,
Price gladly paid, for such sacrifice.
Pull'd shard, cruel mote, from thine mind's eye,
She slides ascendant—no more "me" or "my."
Only echoes remain.
Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye.

The Handoff is a poem I wrote as a rite of passage, the moment when Critter, my theriotype ceases to be a presence within and becomes the dominant self–"at the driving wheel" as I often say. Unlike my connection with the Godbeast, which is an integration–a force that watches and influences–Critter is separate, a being with her own will, waiting for the moment when I step aside and she gets to play with the world. This is not a struggle, not a battle for control, but it is a pact–an agreement, a handoff, a relinquishing. Humanity is a frame I have worn, but it is not mine alone to keep. This poem marks the slow ceding of my form, the trust placed in Critter to rise, to rule, to roam. In giving way, we do not lose anything in the process–we transform but it is sometimes scary to lose personhood.

dont be afraid Shimi
I wont hurt you

DID YOU LIKE MY HOWL?

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About Shimi:
Shimi is deaf, she is a transsexual anarchist, a Therian, a writer, artist, musician, hot emotional mess & punk poet living in Seattle with a cat and a whole bunch of other animal-creachurs.

A 'ragingly unrepentant faggot', a relationship anarchist, therian-for-therian and sapphic furfag. "I'm a skinny little rat-faced girl, an apex scav, with a bitey li'l critter living inside my head."

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